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ABSTRACT

Dramatizations as a response activity during literature study provide a vehicle for students to use language, both verbal and nonverbal, in an educational context. A study focused on a group of five students who chose to use story dramatizations as one way to create their interpretations of the book, "The Slave Dancer" (Fox, 1973). The study, which explored possibilities of how these fifth-grade students, the classroom teacher, and the researcher could co-construct meaning for the novel, combined two research paradigms: action and interpretive research. Data collection was a recursive process; key sources of data were audio- and video-tapes of a small group responding to literature; field notes of classroom observations; a teacher journal and interview; photocopies, videotapes, or student work samples; and interviews of each student who participated in the literature group. The recursive research process was one of revisiting the data, narrowing it down, making interpretations, and describing it. During their reading, journaling, and discussion of the book, the students created two drama projects for "The Slave Dancer." Detailed transcripts of their interaction in the dramatizations show that the students had comprehended the novel and shared that understanding with their classmates. (Contains a list of children's literature and 19 references.) (NKA)

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Fifth Graders' Story Dramatizations During Literature Study

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Running Head: Story Dramatization

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CS 216 680

Fifth Graders' Story Dramatizations During Literature Study

Dramatizations as a response activity during literature study provides a vehicle for students to use language, both verbal and nonverbal in an educational context. When students use drama activities (e.g., readers' theater, in-role, improvisations, dramatizations, etc...) to respond to texts or curriculum content, they are facilitated to "consider the content and context of their language and provided a means that allows clarification, restating, and subsequent comprehension of text" (Booth, 1998).

Several research studies confirm that drama has a positive effect on students' oral language development, multiple perspectives for thinking about texts, and ultimately their literacy learning (Kardash & Wright, 1987; Wagner, 1988 & 1998; Smagorinsky, in press). However, children are rarely given an opportunity to try on the multiple perspectives available in dramatic interpretations. Some educators may lack a comfort-level for demonstrating to students how to use various drama techniques to interact with literature. Many teachers may considered drama as an extracurricular activity and a nonessential part of a literacy curriculum (Wolf & Encisco 1994; Gardner, 1989).

Recently I spent two years co-teaching and researching literature study with a fifth grade teacher in a suburban school in the Midwest. Through my observations, fieldnotes, video- and audio-tapes and analysis of the students' responses, it became clear that story dramatization played an integral role as a response activity for novels. Although I discovered various findings about literature study (see Siddall, 1998), this article focuses on a group of five students who chose to use story dramatizations as one way to create their interpretations for the book, *The Slave Dancer* (Fox, 1973).

The five children began by orally or silently reading each chapter of the book, journaling, and daily discussions of their responses and interpretations of the story. When they had read and discussed half of the book they decided to act out the

characters, themes and story line using the format of a news television broadcast . The group choose characters and cooperatively wrote an outline for their news program which served as a guide for rehearsing their parts before presenting it to classmates. After their first performance, they read the second half of the novel following similar procedures and ended their study of the book with an additional dramatized television show.

This article begins with a description of our philosophy and pedagogy for literature study. Second, the school and classroom setting are described. Next my research methodology, data collection and analysis procedures are reported. Third, transcripts of one groups' dramatizations are examined and interpreted for their significance in constructing meaning.

Students Responding to literature: What Matters?

My view of schooling is to provide students with opportunities to explore the human experience through quality pieces of literature. Reading can serve as a springboard for such reflections, if students have access to avenues for discovering their reactions and insights concerning the human condition.

In student-centered classrooms, children are allowed to choose their materials and activities for literature study. They explore their interpretations of text in multiple ways: through discussions, writing, art, music, dance, or drama. Through these sign systems students can consider their personal experiences and backgrounds to: a) live the human experience, b) explore emotions, c) interpret the story world, and d) communicate their understanding through language, writing, or artistic expression. This practice promotes an understanding of themselves as readers, members of a classroom community, and the world.

The teacher's role is to demonstrate more meaningful responses to literature. This is facilitated by acting as a literature group member to share thinking and reactions

toward a story. Students are "scaffolded" in their construction of meaning by asking questions, nudging, and supporting their thinking beyond the literal levels. Thus, reading is considered a transaction between the reader and text, utilizing students' varied backgrounds, and inviting them to respond in multiple ways. This view of literature instruction can move students toward deeper-level literature responses, interactions and understandings of text.

This study began when I collaborated with a beginning fifth-grade teacher, several days a week, to plan and co-teach reading. Our instruction involved reading from the district-adopted literature anthology as an introduction to new topics or themes found in the novels we were reading. However, the majority of the school year was spent reading various tradebooks. Several of these novels connected to topics of study during social studies and science units. For example, students read about nature and survival in *The Island of the Blue Dolphin*; *Hatchet* , and *The Sign of the Beaver*. They experienced the American Revolution through the novels *Riddle of Penncroft Farm* and *Johnny Termain* . They read literature about immigrants' experiences in *The Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*; and *Felita*. Other books contained themes of social injustice, *Night John*, and *Mississippi Bridge*. Two novels about friendship were *Bridge to Teribitha*, and *Begonia for Miss AppleBaum* . They also read about themes of homelessness in *Monkey Island* and *The Great Gilly Hopkins*.

The teacher and I demonstrated for the class and small groups of children how to have discussions about books . These demonstrations included acting as a group member (e.g., "grand conversations", Peterson & Eeds, 1990) and personally connecting to a story. Some examples included: a) taking an efferent and aesthetic stances (Rosenblatt, 1978), b) sharing individual responses to moral dilemmas of the characters, c) making connections to our lives, d) comparing the story to other texts, e) expressing our confusions and questions, and f) making predictions about the story.

We also demonstrated ways to use response activities as tools for interacting, exploring, and responding to a story. Several of these included: a) reader response logs (Flitterman-King, 1988), b) literature discussion roles and jobs (i.e, investigator, illustrator, and question writer, (Daniels, 1994), d) reader's theater (Siddall, 1995), e) vocabulary strategies, f) how to research time periods for historical fiction, and g) other student-selected and designed projects (i.e., Moffett & Wagner, 1992). These demonstrations were used to invite students toward independently responding and interacting with literature and one another.

The students chose how they read their books. They used a combination of silent and oral reading at school and home. While the small groups were meeting to negotiate their responses and construct meaning, the teacher and I rotated to demonstrate our responses to the novels. We shared our questions, encouraged students to respond aesthetically, and "scaffolded' them to new understandings or to overcoming any difficulties they encountered.

These literature study demonstrations followed a predictable instructional pattern. The teacher began by reading a picture book about a particular topic (e.g., fantasy, Native Americans) or theme (e.g., social injustice). While reading aloud, she shared her thoughts, reactions, and wonderings with the students and invited them to share in a similar manner. A daily read-aloud novel was also used to provide background knowledge and as a vehicle for ongoing class discussions about the theme or topic. These read aloud sessions were followed by small groups of students reading, responding, and discussing a story from their literature anthology. Then several days later, students chose between two or three tradebooks for an extended novel study. All the while, the teacher and I continued to demonstrate our responses to the texts and the "art" of having a literature discussion.

The School and Classroom Setting

The five students in the case-study literature group were selected from a class of 25 fifth graders, enrolled in a racially mixed (85% white and 15% Hispanic, Asian, Indian, or African American) Midwestern public school. The students came from low, middle and upper-middle class socioeconomic levels. The children in the fifth grade classroom were mixed academic ability and were established by the fourth grade teachers from the previous year. Students were divided among three fifth grade teachers based on academic strengths, special education labels, ratio of girls and boys, and English as a second language. Permission was received from all the parents in the classroom for their child to participate in the study. Although only five student were in the case study group.

The criteria for placing the students in small literature groups was based on the novel title they selected, a range of reading abilities (low, average, and high) as determined by the classroom teacher's observations, and a combination of boys and girls.

This teacher was selected based on my observations, conversations, and interactions as a reading specialist with her. Her literacy instruction was an example of "best practice" in this particular school. She seemed to have an understanding, at a classroom application level, of the importance of the transactional approach of the reading process, the role of students making connections and responding to text in multiple ways. This teacher built a community of learners in which student choice, talk, inquiry, self-assessment, and multiple responses to literature were valued and promoted. She also expressed an interest in participating in a classroom-based research study.

Research Methodology and Data Collection

This study combined two research paradigms: action and interpretative

research. I was not testing a problem and solution, but sought to explore possibilities of how the students, classroom teacher, and I could co-construct meaning for a novel.

Taylor (1998) uses the paradigm of "reflective practitioner researcher" to describe the "desire to understand more about pedagogical strategies so a teacher can develop into a more competent professional." He describes this research process as a rigorous, ongoing, investigation of daily classroom practice, characterized by active reflections as literacy events are occurring. The goal is to teach ourselves about our students' responses or lack of responses and determine an instructional course of action.

The teacher and I formed a partnership which jointly planned, implemented, and reflected in and on our instructional practice. Our relationship permitted us to listen to each other, to learn from and build on our evolving understanding of literature study. We collaborated, reflected and asked questions to determine our course of action in the literature group. We also reflected to ask interpretative questions like: What could we have done instructionally to support students' deeper more meaningful discussions? How do the students' dramatizations enhance their construction of meaning? What meaning do discussions of the the social injustice and equity hold for the children?

Our process was recursive and reflexive; we examined and reexamined how our language and behaviors facilitated students' learning. Over time, we proceeded in an action research cycle--an ongoing spiral of steps: planning, taking action, observing, and reflecting (Edminston & Wilhelm, 1996).

The data collection process in this interpretive, action research study was a recursive process. This involved data collection, data reduction, data displays, and conclusion drawing / verification (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Key sources of data were provided by: a) audio- and video- tapes of a small group

responding to literature; b) fieldnotes of classroom observations and my reflections throughout the school year, including the teacher and I demonstrating multiple ways of responding to literature; c) a teacher journal and interview in which she reflected her thoughts about reader response and the interactions of the students; d) photocopies, videotapes, or student work samples; and e) interviews of each student who participated in the literature group in which the data was collected.

These multiple sources of data collection were used to triangulate the data (Kamil, Langer & Shanahan, 1985) and improve the probability that the findings and interpretations are credible (Denzin, 1978).

Analyzing the Data

Following the suggestions of LeCompte and Preissle (1993), the processes of data collection, coding, and analysis was recognized as "inextricably linked" and a cyclic process that shaped the on-going work. Information gathered and feedback from the field was used to develop techniques and strategies for coding and analysis. Research questions were redefined as the meanings that participants attached to things became clearer. The following questions were guides to observation and participation in the classroom:

1. What are the various ways students choose to respond in literature groups?

2. What are the general characteristics of those student responses?

3. What meanings do students attribute to those responses within the interactions of the group? How do students interact with their peers when responding to a piece of literature?

4. What are the various ways a teacher interacts in literature groups? What is the nature of teacher responses and what purposes do those responses serve?

Analysis of the data began simultaneously with the data collection process. Each time I entered and left the classroom I jotted down fieldnotes detailing my impressions,

conversations with the classroom teacher, my interactions with the group, and other interesting group talk that occurred.

During my transcription of 19 audiotapes, containing over 900 minutes of literature study talk, I kept a running journal of student conversations and interactions that indicated deeper-level interpretations of the text. This running journal also included my commentaries, interpretations, insights, and summaries of each session. This initial analysis was informally shared through conversations with the classroom teacher. Her feedback and input during these conversations were considered part of the analysis process.

The next phase in this inductive process was "making sense" of the data. The goal was to attempt to uncover embedded information from the literature group context and make it explicit. Two subprocesses were involved which are labeled as "unitizing" and "categorizing" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Unitizing is a process of coding data into units. These units are best understood as single pieces of information that are interpretable in the absence of any additional information. A unit began and ended as the students changed the topic of conversation. The units were marked by hand, in pencil, during my reading and rereading of the transcripts. Some unit examples were: discussion of a particular story event, reading a reaction from literature log, asking a question about a character's behavior, discussing the beating of a slave, comparing one's self to the main character, teacher explaining a description of slave hold, and teacher asking why they were beating the slave.

Next, these units for each session were cut into strips of paper. This resulted in thousands of strips of conversation which I organized into categories for each session, on eight-foot long sheets of bulletin board paper. These charts provided a visual display of each session and allowed the manipulation of these units into various

categories that began to emerge. When I was satisfied that each unit was placed into a proper category, they were glued on the paper. Some of the taped dialogue was inaudible. Other conversations did not fit neatly into a category. These units were saved until the end of my categorization process and attempts were made to organize them or they were labeled as insignificant to this study.

Categorizing is a process of organizing the coded data units into specific categories. These categories provide descriptive information about the context from which the units were derived. Examples of categories include: intertextual connections to the story, recognition of social injustice and human mistreatment, teacher scaffolding of group, and decision-making to facilitate the group process.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) described this categorizing process as "constant comparative method." This method involved sorting units into temporary categories based on similar features or characteristics. As the temporary categories accumulated a number of units, I generated criteria or rules that served as the basis for inclusion or exclusion decisions. The criteria changed as each unit was categorized. Eventually, every unit of data was assigned to a category based on a specific criteria.

My analysis was also assisted by notes I made while transcribing, fieldnotes, video-tapes, interviews, teacher journal, and students' work. These additional data sources provided supportive documents for my interpretations.

Then, I typed a list of all the category names for each session to facilitate comparisons across 19 sessions. Then I reread the dialogue in each category to select the best representation of each particular category.

After categorization of the transcribed units, I began to select key sections of the transcripts to assist in the reduction of the data, to pursue the process of data display, and to begin to draw some initial conclusions. These key sections of transcripts provided a list of the richest transcripts to be used in the final analysis process.

Additionally, selected video tapes, student work samples, fieldnotes, teacher journal entries, and participant interviews were used, as appropriate, to reinforce the analysis of selected transcripts and provide triangulation of data sources.

Finally, I wrote and revised my interpretations of the conversations by explaining why it is important and the meaning it represented for the students and me (See Siddall, 1998).

In summary, the research process was a recursive one of revisiting the data, narrowing it down, making interpretations and describing it. The discovery of relationships began with the analysis of initial observations, undergoing continuous refinement throughout the data collection and analysis process, and continually examining the process of category coding. Events were constantly compared with previous events, and new categories and new relationships were discovered (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Dramatized Responses to Literature

The classroom teacher introduced the book choices to the class by giving a synopsis of each story. She told the students that these books were stories about the struggles of the Chinese, Hispanic, or African people. In the stories they would encounter themes of multiculturalism, immigration, prejudice, and social injustice. The students selected from *The Year of The Boar and Jackie Robinson* (Lord, 1984); *Felita* (Mohr, 1979); or *The Slave Dancer* (Fox, 1973).

The children were placed into one of five groups based on their novel selection. There were two groups of five which read *The Slave Dancer*, two groups of five that studied *The Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* and a group of five which read *Felita*. The students were directed to choose how their group would read and respond to the book over 15-20 school days.

For a variety of reasons I selected one particular *Slave Dancer* group to conduct

the case-study research. Based on my teaching experiences and classroom observations, this group of three boys and two girls had a range of personalities, discussion abilities, and interacted well with one another. They represented a typical group of fifth grade students. Their academic and reading abilities ranged from identified learning disabilities, average, and above average abilities as determined from their previous academic work. They used 19 class sessions to read, respond, and study their novel.

During their reading, journaling, and discussion of the book, these students created two drama projects for *The Slave Dancer*. Throughout the school year, these students participated in other literature study groups who frequently chose dramatic reenactment of scenes from the novels they read. This group created and performed news programs for the first and then the second half of the book.

Their news plays were structured similarly to local television news programs, but focused on *The Slave Dancer* . Each play began with a student in the role of news anchor, who announced themselves, the name of the program, and gave the audience a phone number to call-in their questions.

The other students played the roles of reporters who interviewed various students acting as people aboard the slave ship, the Moonlight. During these interviews the actors revealed to the audience their emotional anguish and the cruel acts performed on crew members and slaves.

Each play was interspersed with commentary by the anchor person. They shared information about crew members who perished in the wreck of the ship, introduced reporters with interviews, and reminded the audience to call-in with their questions. The programs had a weather person report the temperature, winds, ocean temperature, and ended with advice about appropriate attire to wear for the weather conditions. Each show also ended with an opportunity for audience members, alias

classmates, to ask questions about the characters and events of the book.

The group wrote their news plays and decided the characters and content of the dramas. Each child acted as a news broadcast person, with some students portraying various characters from the story. They presented story facts, reacted in personal or aesthetic ways, created dialogue, and made connections to real news shows.

During their discussions, writing, rehearsing, and performance of their plays, they interacted and responded to the story world in many ways. These multiple sign systems for interacting with the novel enhanced their story understanding by revisiting the story and building levels and layers of story interpretation.

The plot of *The Slave Dancer* is about a thirteen-year-old, Jessie Bollier, who is kidnapped from the piers of New Orleans and taken aboard a slave ship, the Moonlight. There he must play his fife so that captured slaves will "dance," and keep their muscles strong and their bodies profitable.

Jessie is repulsed by the ghastly practices of the slave industry. The story ends years later with Jessie's imprisonment in a Civil War prison. His life remains haunted by the shattering experiences he has lived through.

The four transcript excerpts that follow occurred during their first performance of a news play for their fifth grade class. At the beginning of their play, Alex introduced the name of their show and announced the kidnapping of the main character, Jessie Bollier (line 1). Alice played an interviewer talking with Rob who was acting as Jessie. His character shared his experiences aboard the slave vessel.

(Transcript, day 7, pages 14-19)

1. ALEX: (News anchor voice) (Clears throat) Hi, I'm Alex and welcome to Moonlight. First a young boy is missing. He was captured and taken aboard a ship in New Orleans. His name is Jessie Bollier. More on that update later. Now let's go to Alice on the Moonlight ship.
2. ALICE: (News anchor voice) Hi Alex. I'm here with Jessie Bollier. A thirteen year old. On the Moonlight. Jessie how do you feel about being captured by these men?
3. ROB: (Voice of Jessie Bollier) Well, I don't like it. Because they only captured me because I play the flute.

4. ALICE: (Anchor voice) How do you feel about playing the flute even knowing what is going to happen to the slaves?
5. ROB: (Voice of Jessie) Well at first I didn't want to play, but I don't want to get bit again.
6. ALICE: (Anchor voice) What do you mean bit?
7. ROB: (Voice of Jessie) Well, when I first talked to the captain I got bit in the ear because I answered too quickly.
8. ALICE: (Anchor voice) Do you enjoy playing your flute?
9. ROB: (Voice of Jessie) Yeah when I'm bored and have nothing else to do, I play it.
10. ALICE: (News anchor voice) What types of mistreatment have you seen done to the slaves?
11. ROB: (Voice of Jessie) Well I've seen them shoving, roughing them up. And I really don't want to go into the details.
12. ALICE: (Anchor voice) Have you seen any deaths?
13. ROB: (Voice of Jessie) Yes /?/.
14. ALICE: (Anchor voice) Ok. Thank you. Back to Alex at the studio.

In this scene Alex creatively projected himself into the role of a news journalist to share basic information, with the audience, about the main character. Although it was a literal or efferent reporting of information, it represented the gist of the story and clarified the purpose of their play for the audience (line 1). Alex promised to share more details of the kidnapping later in the broadcast. He continued in his anchor role by introducing Alice's interview of Jessie.

Clearly, Alex has watched news programs as demonstrated by his reporter language and the format of the play mirrors typical news shows. He connected his television experiences to create his role to share *The Slave Dancer* with classmates.

Alice displayed the sophistication of a real television interviewer. Her questions were appropriate and assisted Rob in sharing literal story content with the audience. This indicates her prior experiences with television shows with an interviewer format.

Rob drew on his emotions and story knowledge to portray Jessie. Playing a character required Rob to think like Jessie, interpret the story events, and project those thoughts to the class. The cognitive activity of going back and forth between interpreting story content and projecting emotions of a character developed deeper and richer understanding of the main character for Rob.

Their dramatization promoted richer thinking and interpretation of the book. These students went beyond reporting mere story facts. They delved deeper into the story by portraying journalists and the main character to recreate the novel for the audience.

The play continued with Alex injecting a bit of humor as he introduced an interview aboard the Moonlight. Joe took on the role of interviewer. This time Rob switched from the role of an abused Jessie to play the part of Clay Purves, a crew member who justified his employment on a slave boat.

(Transcript, day 7, pages 14-19)

1. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Oh! Sorry about that, good book. Ok, umm thanks Alice for that report. Now lets go to Joe with an interview on the Moonlight. Joe.
2. JOE: (Anchor voice) Hi, I'm Joe . Here live on the Moonlight with Clay Purves. I'm going to be asking him some questions. Purves, how do you feel about kidnapping this young boy Jessie?
3. ROB: (Voice of Clay Purves) Well, I don't, well, I guess I have to do to get money.
4. JOE: (Anchor voice) Ok. How do you feel about being punished even though you didn't steal the Captain's egg?
5. ROB: (Voice of Purves) Well I thought it was cruel because they didn't /?/. They could have asked everybody in the crew .
6. JOE: (Anchor voice) Why are you sailing on this illegal slave boat?
7. ROB: (Voice of Purves) Well, I couldn't find any other jobs. So I guess this is the job I have to do.
8. JOE: (Anchor voice) Do you like the captain and the mate?
9. ROB: (Voice of Purves) No
10. JOE: (Anchor voice) Why?
11. ROB: (Voice of Purves) Because he's mean and it's not worth it /?/
12. JOE: (Anchor voice) Ok. Thanks Purves. Now back to you Alex. Alex!

In this instance their construction of meaning went beyond the literal story elements to take an aesthetic or personal stance towards the story events. They responded in this manner to an egg stealing incident, Jessie's kidnapping, and the cruelty in the novel.

Once again Alex began the scene, but interjected a bit of situational comedy humor. He pretended to be a "Ted Baxter" type character by not realizing that the camera had returned to him in the studio (line 1). He acted surprised when the audience caught him reading a copy of *The Slave Dancer* . Alex used this humorous bit to entertain

and generate laughter from the audience. His character immediately became serious as an anchor person to introduce Joe with an interview aboard the Moonlight.

Joe mirrored real television interviewers when he asked pertinent questions dealing with the events from the book. His questions displayed a literal understanding of the story elements and facilitated Rob's character to share novel content from Clay Purves's perspective.

Rob switched characters in this scene to display the attitude and feelings of a crew member. These interpretations were created by Rob and not described by the author. He went beyond a literal level and interpreted the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of Clay Purves (lines 3,5,7, & 11). His combination of character perspective switching and interpreting the story beyond the text is an example of meaningful responses to literature.

In the following short dialogue, Alex compared their play to a real television show. He announced a commercial encouraging the audience to purchase the book. Alex also gave the audience an acronym for reporting information about the kidnapped character.

(Transcript, day 7, pages 14-19)

1. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Oh! Sorry about that. Remember this book sells at Borders. Ok! Thanks Joe. Now this is America's Most Wanted. Special presentation. A 13 year old boy, Jessie Bollier is missing. We believe he has been captured and taken aboard on an illegal slave voyage, called the Moonlight. If you see him or have any information, call 555-I'm a tattle tale.
2. JOE: (Anchor voice) Remember folks, that's 555-I am a tattle tale. Or 555-42628288538253.

In this segment, they made three connections to their experiences outside of the novel. Alex mentioned Borders Bookstore, as the location to purchase the book. He refers to America's Most Wanted, a weekly television show which features wanted criminals. Alex and Joe also offered the audience a phone number to call with information about the missing boy. This reference is similar to other popular call-in

television programs.

These are types of connections in which students bring together their television literacies to literature study and validate their life experiences.

This next example is also a connection. In the story, the Moonlight is on a slave voyage to pick up slaves in Africa and return to America. Kim acted as meteorologist to report the weather conditions.

(Transcript, day 7, pages 14-19)

1. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Ok. Now let's go to Kim with the weather. Kim.
2. KIM: (Anchor voice) Thank you ALEX. Hello I'm Kim with the latest weather report. First on the list: strong winds blowing around 65 mph, with some showers later on around the African area. The Atlantic water temperature is around 70 degrees Fahrenheit with a strong current. We hope to see some sun later on. So if you're sailing the Atlantic be sure to have your poncho. Back to ALEX.

The author briefly mentions the weather several times throughout the book. However, Kim took the weather topic further by interpreting how the winds, and water might have been near Africa. Her experiences with news programs might include weather reports and the influence they have on our lives. She reported geographical information by mentioning the Atlantic Ocean and announced probable wind speeds and water temperatures off the western coast of Africa. Kim made connections between her life and the text which contributed to her understanding and interest for the setting of the story.

In their final scene, Joe interviewed Kim, a slave aboard the ship. Kim and Joe constructed meaning by imagining what a slave might have experienced and felt on the Moonlight ship. The author graphically describes the horrors performed on the slaves, but does not write about their personal backgrounds.

(Transcript, day 7, pages 14-19)

1. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Oh, ok thanks Kim. Now let's go to another interview with Joe .
2. JOE: (Anchor voice) Hello it's me again on the other side of the Moonlight. Here I am with a slave that has been taken from their home in Africa /?/ slavery. I will ask her some questions. You have

family at your home in Africa?
3. KIM: (Voice of slave) Yes, I have a family /?/
4. JOE: (Anchor voice) Do you miss your family?
5. KIM: (Voice of slave) I miss my family very much
6. JSiddall: Louder
7. KIM: (Voice of slave) I had /?/
8. JOE: (Anchor voice) Were any other of your relatives taken away as slaves?
9. KIM: (Voice of slave) Yes, they were, but none of them are on this ship.
10. JOE: (Anchor voice) What is your real name? What do they call you on the ship?
11. KIM: (Slave voice) My real name is Sarah, but on the ship they call me Star.
12. JOE: (Anchor voice) All right. How do the sailors treat you on the ship?
13. KIM: (Voice of slave) They make us dance so we stay strong. They pack us in little rooms and /?/
14. JOE: (Anchor voice) Thank you. Now back to you Alex.

Alex began by thanking Kim for her weather report and introduced Joe with an interview. On this occasion he played his part without humor and fulfilled his perfunctory role as anchor person.

Joe went beyond literal comprehension to create more meaningful and deeper understanding of the text. He played the role of interviewer, asking questions about the slave's life not described in the text. He empathized with the slave woman in leaving her relatives and being treated inhumanely (line 4).

Subsequently following Kim's role as weather person, she played a slave women. These opposite perspectives contributed to Kim's deeper understanding and multiple interpretations of the story. As a meteorologist she was outside of the lives of the characters to report the weather. In her role of a slave woman, she was a victim of heinous acts.

This segment represents the students' ability to enter deeply into the story world and illustrates their understanding of the grisly conditions that the slaves faced. During the process of creating their parts they made emotional connections that went beyond literal comprehension. This is the type of meaning we want students to

construct, taking on multiple perspectives and interpretations of characters' lives and events.

Unfortunately, in this instance, I interrupted their scene (line 6) by requesting them to speak louder for the audience. This may have hindered their continuity and concentration for acting out the scene. This was an occasion in which my role may have been detrimental to their literature study.

The next seven transcript segments are from their 19th and final literature study session. This dialogue is from their second play performance for their classmates. It contained information from the second half of the novel. Similar to their first play, they constructed meaning literally, figuratively, emotionally, and made connections to their lives.

In the second half of the novel, the Moonlight is 100 miles from the United States when it encounters another American ship. The crew throws all the slaves overboard to escape criminal prosecution from the government.

Simultaneously a storm begins and sinks the boat. All of the crew and slaves are killed. Jessie, the main character, and a slave boy, Ras manage to escape to a nearby island. An inhabitant named Daniel helps the boys. Eventually Ras leaves the island with the underground slave railroad. Jessie is given directions to walk home to New Orleans. The boys never see each other again.

The novel ends describing Jessie's life as a grown man. He fought with the Union Army in the Civil War and spent three months in Andersonville prison. Jessie's life was haunted by his experiences aboard the slave voyage.

Twelve sessions after their first dramatization, Alex, Joe, and Alice began the second episode of their news program.

(Transcript, day 19, pages 1-14)

1. ALEX: Part two, the second episode. So we hope you enjoy it.
   (Clears throat)
2. ...

3. JOE: (Anchor voice) 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and Action!
4. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Hi. I'm Alex .
5. ALICE: (Anchor voice) And I'm Alice .
6. ALEX: & ALICE: (Anchor voice) And welcome to Moonlight News.
7. ALICE: (Anchor voice) The second episode. Later today we will be taking calls from the viewers.
8. ALEX: (Anchor voice) You may want to write this number down. It's 555-Call Now! That's 555-Call Now! Now, let's go to Kim with the weather. Kim!

Alex began by briefly introducing their play to the class. For this dramatization, they added Joe in the role of stage manager. He counted down for the actors before the camera began filming (line 3). He had probably seen movie makers conduct a similar process during production.

For this episode they had two anchor people, Alex and Alice, to moderate the program. They introduced themselves and announced the name of the program like typical news broadcasters.

Similar to popular television programs like America's Most Wanted or The Larry King Show, a connection was made by offering the audience a call-in number. Alex ended this segment like real news programs, by introducing Kim with a weather report.

In this second episode, Kim reported the weather conditions and the wreck of the Moonlight ship as described by the author, Paula Fox.

(Transcript, day 19, pages 1-14)

1. KIM: (Anchor voice) Hello all of you out there. I hope you're all dry because that was a horrible storm last night.
2. ROB: (Anchor voice) News flash!
3. KIM: (Anchor voice) Yesterday during the storm, there was a ship wreck in the Gulf of Mexico. I hear there were two survivors aboard the Moonlight ship which have been found. First, the sky turned a charcoal gray, the temperature dropped. It thundered and lightninged and the tiny ship was lost. /?/ The Bay of Benin will be /?/. They picked up 98 slaves and traveled back across the Atlantic. Two survivors, Jessie and Ras, made it back to Mississippi. Back to Alex and Alice with more on the Moonlight.

Kim played the role of television weather reporter. Rob interrupted her broadcast with a news flash. This is similar to real television programs in which special reports or announcements are made. She described the story facts of the weather conditions

that caused the wreck of the ship and the survival of the main character, Jessie and the slave boy, Ras.

In these two scenes, the students used their knowledge of present day television shows and broadcasters to make connections to the pages of the novel. These connections brought the story world alive for them and their classmates. Their process of dramatization aided them to see life through the eyes of the characters and promoted richer and deeper ways of interacting with the story.

As the play continued, Alex interjected humor by offering to order a pizza for Alice (lines 1 & 3). He continued the scene by reading the names of the crew members of the Moonlight who were lost in the shipwreck.

(Transcript, day 19, pages 1-14)

1. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Alice what do you want on your pizza?
2. ALICE: (Anchor voice) Alex!
3. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Cheese, ok, delivered. Ok, about that news flash Kim just got. We've got some more information. The ship's name was the Moonlight. Officers: Captain Cathorne-the Master,
4. ALICE: (Whispers) Cawthorne
5. ALEX: (Anchor voice) I'M SORRY! CAWTHORNE-the Master and Nicholas Spark-the Mate. Crew: Jessie Bollier, John Cooley, Adolph Curry, Louis Gardere, Ned Grime, Isaac Porter, Clay Purvis, Claudius Sharkey, Seth Smith, Benjamin Stout, and Sam Wick. Cargo: 98 slaves whose true names were remembered only by their families except by the young boy Ras. They were ship wrecked in the Gulf of New Mexico. Huh?
6. ALICE: (Anchor voice) (Whispers) Let's take a minute... Ok.
7. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Oh, ok. Let's take a minute. Minute's over. They were shipwrecked in the Gulf of New Mexico, June 3, 1840. Survivors-two.

Alex's humor in offering to order a pizza is a comedic bit that he probably saw on a television sitcom or comedy show like Saturday Night Live. Alice yelled his name pretending to be upset with Alex's mischievousness. She wanted him to get back to the facts of reporting the deaths on the Moonlight. Their dialogue continued with her interruption of Alex a second time (line 4) to correct his pronunciation of the captain's name. Alice is playing the role of the "straight" person and Alex was in the role of

comedian. That is, she pretended to be shocked by Alex's antics which added humor to the scene.

Alex continued the scene by reading the names of the dead from the prologue of the book. They also offered a moment of silence for the victims of the wreck (lines 6 & 7). These connections are similar to real news broadcasts in which announcers report tragic events, read the names of the dead, and use the custom of silence to respect the deceased.

These ways of interacting with text through drama are representative of students entering into the story world in deeper ways. This was accomplished when they brought in their experiences with television, comedy, reporting tragedies, and respecting the dead with silence.

The next segment Rob played an interviewer and Joe acted as the main character, Jessie Bollier. Their scene brought to life the words of the text.

(Transcript, day 19, pages 1-14)

1. ALICE: (Anchor voice) Now let's go to Rob with an interview with Jessie Bollier.
2. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Rob.
3. ROB: (Anchor voice) Thank you Alex. Hi! I'm Rob . I'm here with Jessie Bollier. I will be asking him some questions today. Ok. What was it like when the ship sunk?
4. JOE: (Jessie's voice) It got really dark and then it started to pour. I got really scared and went down in the holds.
5. ROB: (Anchor voice) Did you think you were going to die?
6. JOE: (Jessie's voice) I did because the men had closed the hold after I got in. There wasn't that much food. I only had the biscuits that the Captain gave me. There wasn't a lot of water.
7. ROB: (Anchor voice) Who did you think was the meanest person on the ship and why?
8. JOE: (Jessie's voice) The Captain. He likes to treat the slaves poorly. When I refused to play my fife to make them dance, he had Stout whip me five times.
9. ROB: (Anchor voice) Ok. Now, were you happy or sad when Ras left?
10. JOE: (Jessie's voice) I was pretty sad because he was sort of a friend to me, you know.
11. ROB: (Anchor voice) A friend like? You had gone through a lot of stuff together?
12. JOE: (Jessie's voice) Yea, yea.
13. ROB: (Anchor voice) Would you ever go out and buy another fife?

Do you like to go out and listen to music?

14. JOE: (Jessie's voice) No, I can't stand music. Because in the back of my mind, certain sounds, /?/ shackles /?/.
15. ROB: (Anchor voice) OK back to Alex and Alice.

This transcript portrays a combination of describing story events, but adds rich emotional connections that went beyond the book.

Rob and Joe constructed dialogue concerning how a person might feel living through these barbaric experiences which the author does not describe (lines 3,5,7,9, & 10-14). This talk represents a deeper understanding of the story and characters beyond the literal level. The students related their emotional states to how Jessie feared dying, starving in the hold, reactions to the captain's cruelty, and his inability to enjoy music any longer. They also made judgments about Jessie taking comfort in having Ras, a slave boy, as a companion throughout the ship sinking ordeal.

Interspersed in their dialogue were factual story events. They used the author's descriptions of the weather, hiding in the hold, a lack of food, and Jessie playing his fife (lines 4,6,8). These literal elements are important to basic story comprehension, but they also interpreted the character's emotional trauma.

The final three sections of transcripts involved the fifth grade class who asked questions about the story as if it were a real-life situation. They were in role as audience members to explore extended understandings and interpretations of the characters and situations beyond the pages of the text. Alex and Alice continued to play anchor people and answered the questions from the viewers.

(Transcript, day 19, pages 1-14)

1. ALICE: (Anchor voice) Thank you Rob for that awesome interview. Now we will be taking calls from the viewers. Remember that number is 555
2. ALEX: & ALICE: (Anchor voice) 555-Call Now.
3. ALEX: That was my line.
4. ALICE: (Anchor voice) 555-Call Now.
5. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Ok.
6. /?/: RINNNGGGGGG
7. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Is any one out there? I'll get that one. HELLO?
8. /?/: (Viewer with Southern dialect) Hi! I'm Betty /?/ from Chicago. I'd

like to know what ever happened to Jessie and Ras?
9. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Ok, we've got a caller. She wants. You're a she? Ok (Class laughs). She wants to know whatever happened to Betty and Ras. You want to answer her?
10. ALICE: (Anchor voice) No, you can.
11. /?/: /?/.
12. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Yea. Hold on. Ok. What happened to Ras, well, he was a slave and once the ship was shipwrecked, he and Jessie kinda swam to a little island which wasn't an island. It was actually Mississippi and met this guy called DAN. Daniel actually. Two slave men or free slaves took Ras and took him on the underground railroad. What happened to Jessie was he fought in the Civil War on the Union side. He was captured because he was on the Union side. He was put in prison in Andersonville for three months and he got a lot of torture. You still there?
13. /?/: Yea, hold on. No, that's it thank you.
14. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Ok.

Alice thanked Rob for his interview with Jessie following the format of television news shows like 20/20 and Primetime Live.

Alex reminded Alice that she was saying his line (line 3), but accepts her interruption because he had a chance to chime the phone number with her (line 2). At this point in their play, an unidentified classmate enters into their imaginary broadcast (line 6). It is unclear whether the student was prompted to speak with a southern dialect or if she randomly chose to do so (line 8). Alex played off of the humor by asking is she was female, which caused the class to laugh.

The female caller asked what happened to Ras, a slave boy, who escaped the ship wreck with Jessie (line 8). Alex interpreted her question as an inquiry about Ras and Betty (line 9). Betty was the sister of Jessie who is briefly described at the beginning of the book. He proceeded to answer her question by describing the details of the end of the novel (line 12).

It was obvious that these students had comprehended the novel and shared that understanding with classmates. However, they went beyond literal comprehension and brought the novel alive through their dramatization of the characters and events.

Alex and Alice continued in role as anchor people to answer questions from the

audience about Jessie.

(Transcript, day 19, pages 1-14)

1. Dan: What was Andersonville?
2. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Ok. Let me stop you. Ok. Well, Andersonville was a prison.
3. ALEX: Wasn't it a prison?
4. ALICE: Uh huh.
5. ALEX: (Anchor voice) It was prison. Jessie was captured, put in the prison, and tortured. Got it? Is that it?
6. Dan: Yea.
7. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Ok, bye

Their answer about Andersonville prison is brief, but a connection between a historical location and the novel (line 2). In the last few paragraphs of the novel, Paula Fox reveals that Jessie spent three months in Andersonville, but fails to describe what it was. The students obtained information from their classroom teacher that it was a Civil War prison. Coincidentally there was a cable television movie about Andersonville prison during their study of *The Slave Dancer*. Several students in the class had watched the movie and talked about it.

It was interesting how the students filled in their knowledge gaps about Andersonville. By asking their teacher, viewing a movie, or conversations, they became informed about a detail from the novel. This illustrates that students construct meaning in multiple ways beyond the words of the text.

In the final moments of their play they continued to talk about the main character, Jessie, and what happened to him. The class pushed Alex and Alice to give details of Jessie's imprisonment which the author does not describe.

(Transcript, day 19, pages 1-14)

1. /?/: Ring, ring
2. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Oh, hello.
3. /?/: How did they torture Jessie?
4. ALEX: (Anchor voice) We have not a clue. That's top secret information. They whipped him. They didn't beat him. Is that torture enough?
5. /?/: Not really.
6. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Well, we do not know how he was tortured, but we know he was tortured.
7. ALICE: (Anchor voice) Thanks for calling.

8. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Thanks for calling.
9. MARCUS: I wanted to know if Jessie is still alive, right now?
10. ALICE: Yea.
11. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Well, it's been like, what, a 100 years since the Civil War.
12. MARCUS: Oh.
13. ALEX: (Anchor voice) We have background information if you would like to know some things about him.
14. MARCUS: What I really want to know is, what he's like actually after he was in Andersonville?
15. ALEX: (Anchor voice) He was alive. He got out of prison after the war. He was in there for three months being torture.
16. MARCUS: Why was he being tortured?
17. ALICE: Because
18. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Because he was on the Union side.
19. MARCUS: Who fought again?
20. ALICE: & ALEX: The Confederates. ALEX: Yea, thanks.
21. MARCUS: That's nice
22. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Ok, wait, wanta know anything else?
23. MARCUS: No, I don't.
24. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Ok.
25. MARCUS: Bye.
26. ALEX: (Anchor voice) Bye.

At this point in their conversation, the play ended with classmates' applause. Some of the information Alex and Alice shared with the class can be found in the prologue of the book (lines 6,15, & 18), but they created part of their answers (lines 4,11, & 20) from information not given by the author.

It is interesting how Kim, Joe, and Rob do not contribute information to answer the students' questions. They may have let Alex and Alice perform this duty as part of their roles as anchor people.

Marcus, an audience member, asked Alex if Jessie, the main character, was still alive (line 9). This question forced Alex to think about the historical time frame that the novel is set and answer appropriately (line 11). The fifth grader was either unaware of the books historical setting or he lacked the background knowledge for the Civil War. Marcus recovered his dignity by asking Alex a follow-up question about Andersonville prison (line 14). Alex connected his background knowledge about the Civil War to answer his question. He knew the war was over 100 years ago and there were the

Confederate and Union armies (lines 11,18 & 20).

The children pretended to be news anchor people as they reported the historical facts and their reactions to the slave voyage for the audience. The students connected real television programs to their dramatization and spoke about the characters as if they were real people.

Immediately following the completion of this novel, the class participated in a unit of study about the Civil War. They had constructed an understanding of the lives and events surrounding the slave industry in historical fiction and drew on that information to enhance their comprehension of historical events contained in expository text.

Conclusions

Although I discovered several findings about literature study in general for these five students and the fifth grade class, this article focused on using story dramatization to interact with a piece of literature. During their discussions, writing, rehearsing, and performance of their plays, they interacted and responded to the story world in many ways. These multiple sign systems for interacting with the novel enhanced their story understanding by revisiting the story and building levels and layers of story interpretation. Their process of dramatization aided them to see life through the eyes and emotions of the characters. They presented story facts, reacted in personal or aesthetic ways, created dialogue, and made connections to real news shows. These connections brought the story world alive for them and their classmates.

Using dramatizations during literature study, these students used their imaginations to enter into the text, create interpretations and reactions to the grisly conditions of the slave voyage. This type of response activity has the potential to encompass more children into literacy's embrace. The continual cognitive activity involved in drama--the engagement, the personal and negotiated interpretations of story, the shifts in perspective, problem solving, and the use of multiple sign systems can assist children

in constructing layers and levels of meaning for the texts they read.

Transcript conventions

Literature study sessions were transcribed as recorded on audio tapes. Students' names are pseudonyms. The transcripts are labeled day 1 through day 19 to indicate which session the dialogue occurred. Some of the data sources are identified by the date which the event happened. Page numbers indicate the location of the dialogue within the session. Each line of dialogue is labeled with the student's name. The lines are numbered to display turn-taking and to facilitate reference to particular segments of conversation. Parentheses are used next to the children's names when character voices were used for dramatic purposes.

The following transcript conventions were used:

CAPS	indicate emphatic stress in their voice
/?/	indicate inaudible or uncertain utterance
...	indicate pauses of several seconds or more in the conversation
Horizontal text	indicate overlaps in talk and simultaneous dialogue

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